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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000500

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/WE (JLEVIN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 7/15/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [RP](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: VATICAN CONFIRMS IT PRESSURED FILIPINO BISHOPS

REF: A) MANILA 00318; B) MANILA 3202; C) VATICAN 473; D) VATICAN 489

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, POL, Vatican, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Holy See Country Director for the Philippines Monsignor Luis Montemayor confirmed July 14 that the Vatican pressured the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) not to support protests calling for the resignation of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Montemayor noted that the recently-deceased Cardinal Jaime Sin had been an obstacle to the Vatican's influence over the bishops, but that they were "now hearing our message." With this episode, and the Holy See's recent input on the involvement of Catholic bishops in protests in East Timor (ref c), the Vatican appears to be intent on communicating its preference that clergy focus on the pastoral rather than the political. End Summary.

Pastoral not Political

[1](#)2. (C) Monsignor Luis Montemayor, Holy See Country Director for the Philippines, confirmed reports (ref b) that via the Holy See's Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines, Antonio Franco, the Vatican had pressured the CBCP to remain neutral in the controversy surrounding President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. He told us that although the Vatican's preferences on the matter had never been a secret, Franco had for the first time on July 9 explained in no uncertain terms to the CBCP that the Vatican did not support popular uprisings as a method to remove a government. "We put a lot of pressure on the bishops" not to support the protests calling for the president's resignation, he said, adding that the Vatican "insisted that the bishops distinguish between pastoral care and political involvement."

Sin had Different View

[1](#)3. (C) Montemayor, a former Department IVP recipient who has covered the Philippines since 2001, emphasized that he had always opposed Catholic clergy's involvement in popular uprisings against the government. "In 2001, with the protests against Estrada, I pressured the bishops to stay neutral," he said. "They wouldn't listen to me." Montemayor suspects that the bishops were not getting the message. Montemayor knew recently deceased Cardinal Jaime Sin very well, and said the prelate had been "a major obstacle." "We didn't see eye to eye on the issue [of political involvement by the clergy]." "Sin felt it was his moral responsibility towards the people to intervene," Montemayor added, "but we must support democracy and due process. Otherwise we are opening Pandora's box." His comments tracked closely with ref (b) as he suggested that with the death of Cardinal Sin, the current bishops are more amenable to instruction from the Vatican.

Comment

[1](#)4. (C) The Holy See is hesitant to get out in front of its bishops in opposing local political leaders (recent ref (d) conversations on Venezuela are a case in point), but the Vatican is also loath to see clergy take active political roles. In fact, the principle of avoiding direct political involvement is enshrined in canon law, even if not always followed. Unlike in matters of "faith and morals," the Holy See's control over local bishops on political matters is uneven. Montemayor added that in this case an additional difficulty in communicating the Holy See's policy was the papal nuncio. Franco "acts like a father figure to the bishops, encouraging them even when they go the wrong way," Montemayor said. In any case, with this episode and the Holy See's recent input on the involvement of Catholic bishops in protests in East Timor (ref c), the Holy See has proven to be intent on communicating its preference that clergy focus on the pastoral rather than the political. End comment.

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